

# ORDINATION HOMILY

ARCHBISHOP TIMOTHY COSTELLOE SDB

**T**HIS MORNING here in the Cathedral we find ourselves caught up in a celebration which takes us to the very heart of our identity as Catholics. Our Catholic tradition has always recognized that Jesus, the living presence of God among us as one of us, is absolutely at the centre of our faith. To be a Christian is to live as a disciple, in a relationship of fidelity, commitment and love with Christ. And it is this living relationship which becomes the source of our ability to live according to the teachings, the spirit and the power of the gospel. It is not just what we do, but what inspires us and enables us to do what we do, that makes us Christians.

For us this living relationship with Jesus is strengthened and deepened through the gift of the Eucharist. We have only to reflect on the words of Jesus in St John's gospel, where he assures us that those who eat his flesh and drink his blood will have life in him, to realize that the Eucharist is the very heart of our faith. Every time we gather to celebrate Mass we are drawn into the mystery of the Lord's gift of himself to us. We eat his flesh, we drink his blood, we become one with him, and he sends us out to be his body and his blood, his life-giving presence, to everyone we meet. *'Do this in memory of me'* doesn't simply mean *'celebrate the Eucharist in memory of me'*; it means *'be the Eucharist in memory of me'*.

As ordained priests these men, our relatives, friends and colleagues, who come before us this morning, will be the ones who through their ministry, and especially through their celebration of the Eucharist, enable this profound communion with the Lord to happen. Our tradition tells us that priests are ordained to act in the person of Christ, the head of his body. When in the praying of the Eucharistic prayer they repeat the words Jesus

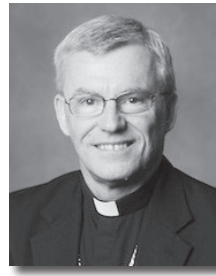
spoke over the bread and wine at the Last Supper, they do so in the name of and even more in the person of Christ himself. It is he, through the power of his Spirit and the ministry of his priests, who consecrates the bread and the wine. It is he who says, *'Take and eat, take and drink—this is my body and my blood'*: it is he who hands himself over to us in this extraordinary gesture of love. Those ordained as priests are called to do the same thing: to hand themselves over to God's people in an extraordinary gesture of love.

To be called to such a ministry is an overpowering and even frightening thing. Who is worthy of such a task? Who would dare to presume to take this upon himself? Indeed who would be so presumptuous as to believe he was in any way equipped for this? It is vitally important then for our candidates this morning to have engraved on their hearts and on their minds some other words of Jesus: *'You did not choose me—no I chose you'*. And in remembering those words our candidates should also remember the words of St Paul: *'God chooses the foolish things of the world to shame the wise; God chooses the weak things of the world to shame the strong'* (1 Cor 1:27). Our candidates for ordination today will grow into the good and faithful priests we need them to be if they remember these things: that it is all God's doing, all God's grace—and only God can make sense of our weakness and our foolishness and through them bring strength and wisdom to people's lives—but only if we let him. If we are convinced we are strong, and wise, and have been chosen because of our extraordinary talents, insights or capabilities, then there is little that God can do for us or in us. Our pride will make us obstacles to God's healing and saving presence in the lives of his people,

rather than the signs and bearers of his love that we are called to be.

Conor, Garner, Grant, Israel, Jeffrey, Patrick, Simeon, and Stephen, as men who will act in the person of Christ, not only in your sacramental ministry but in every encounter you have with God's people, it is important to know, really know, and not just know about, the Christ you are called to bring to others.

And at this moment in the Church's history, as we prepare to enter into the Year of Mercy proclaimed by Pope Francis, I want to invite you to reflect deeply on the opening words of the Pope's letter announcing this special jubilee year: *'Jesus Christ is the face of the Father's mercy'*. You are being ordained as priests at this precise moment in our history. Your first full year of priestly ministry will unfold in the context of this graced year. In this I believe there is a divine providence at work. The Lord is calling to you, urgently and insistently, to commit yourselves to ensuring that the living out of your priesthood is deeply marked by this quality of divine mercy. He is calling you, as living icons of the Good Shepherd, to be, yourselves, in Jesus, *'the face of the Father's mercy'*. Pope Francis says of Jesus that *'everything in him speaks of mercy. Nothing in him is devoid of compassion'*. If the people with whom and for whom you will work in your priestly ministry can say this of you you will know that you are becoming the priests the Lord has called you



*Archbishop Timothy Costelloe SDB is the Archbishop of Perth*

to be and we need you to be.

It is for us, your brother priests, your fellow disciples of Jesus, those with whom and for whom you will live and work, to help, encourage and support you as you seek to unveil for us the merciful face of God. You will come to know if you are succeeding when, in your moments of prayer, you can recognize in yourself the traces of the face of Christ. You will know if you are succeeding, too, if you can see in the faces of those you encounter that spark of joy, or hope or peace which comes from an encounter with Christ. Learn to read in the faces of your people whether you are leading them to the God of mercy or leading them astray. Be unveilers, not obscurers, of the merciful face of the Father.

For this reason, and with this hope in our hearts, our prayer for you today is the prayer we pray at every ordination: *May God who has begun the good work in you bring it to fulfillment.*

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*The Sacrament of Reconciliation, indeed, allows us to draw near to the Father with trust to have the certainty of his forgiveness. He is truly "rich in mercy" and extends it abundantly upon those who appeal to Him with a sincere heart.*

*Being here to experience his love, in any case, is above all a fruit of his grace. As the Apostle Paul reminded us, God never ceases to demonstrate the wealth of his mercy throughout the centuries. The transformation of the heart that leads us to confess our sins is a "gift from God". We can not do it alone. The power to confess our sins is a gift from God, it is a gift, it is "his work" (cf. Eph 2:8-10).*

**—Pope Francis**